

Hippopotamus lemerlei

Hippopotamus lemerlei, or the **Malagasy dwarf hippopotamus**, is an extinct species of Malagasy hippopotamus.

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Taxonomy

Malagasy hippopotamuses were first discovered in the mid-19th century by Alfred Grandidier, who unearthed nearly 50 individual hippos from a dried-up swamp at Ambolisaka near Lake Ihotry,^{[1][2]} a few miles from the Mozambique Channel. In 1989, Scandinavian palaeontologist Solweig Stuenes described *H. madagascariensis* and *H. lemerlei* from these bones.^{[3][4]}

It may have descended from full-sized hippos who shrunk due to insular dwarfism, similar to many Mediterranean island hippos, such as with the Cretan dwarf hippopotamus or the Cyprus dwarf hippopotamus.

Description

Hippopotamus lemerlei bones have been mostly discovered in the rivers and lakes (riparian environments) of western Madagascar, suggesting a habitat very similar to that of the modern hippo of modern Africa. *H. lemerlei* also shared the high-placed eyes that make it easier to see while submerged.^[4]

Although a clear relative to the common hippopotamus, *H. lemerlei* was much smaller, roughly the size of the modern pygmy hippopotamus. The largest specimens were 2.0 m (6.5 ft) long and 2.5 ft (0.76 m) tall.

Hippopotamus lemerlei

Temporal range: Holocene



H. lemerlei at the Museum für Naturkunde, Berlin

Scientific classification

Kingdom:	Animalia
Phylum:	Chordata
Class:	Mammalia
Order:	Artiodactyla
Family:	Hippopotamidae
Genus:	<i>Hippopotamus</i>
Species:	† <i>H. lemerlei</i>

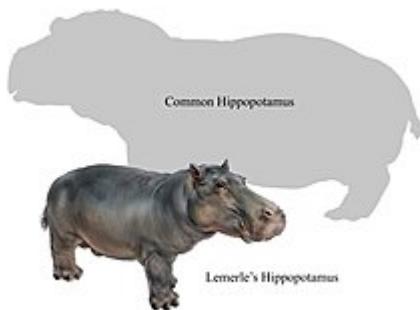
Binomial name

†***Hippopotamus lemerlei***

Solweig Stuenes, 1989

Bones of *H. lemerlei* have been dated to about 1,000 years ago (980±200 radiocarbon years before present).^[5]

Paleoecology



Reconstruction of *H. lemerlei* in front of a silhouette of the modern hippo

Diet

Hippopotamus lemerlei and contemporary *Aldabrachelys* tortoises were the dominant grazers in Madagascar. Malagasy hippos in general, however, were less grass-specialised than the mainland African hippo.^[6]

Extinction

Although there have been no remains dating to within the last thousand years, the hippopotamus has been surprisingly common in Malagasy oral legends. In different regions of Madagascar, stories were recorded of the *mangarsahoc*, the *tsy-aomby-aomby*, the *omby-rano*, and the *laloumena*, all animals that resembled hippopotamuses.^[7] The strength of these oral traditions led the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to classify *H. lemerlei* as recently extinct (going extinct some time after the year 1500).^[8]

At least seven hippopotamus bones show unequivocal signs of butchery, suggesting that they survived until humans arrived on Madagascar, perhaps coexisting with humans for about 2,000 years. It is also possible over-hunting of humans led to their extinction.^[4]

See also

- *Hippopotamus madagascariensis*
- *Hippopotamus laloumena*

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